Educational Attainment Gap
Role of the Third and Private Sectors

1. Introduction to LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland is the largest youth and community-based organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people in Scotland. Our contact details are noted at the back of the document. The evidence within this document comes from the organisation’s experience working with LGBT young people for over 25 years and from our consultation with LGBT young people.

2. Role of the third sector

The third sector complements formal learning by providing experiences and opportunities to young people that enable them to achieve: working directly with schools to support improved learning experiences and achievement, and outwith schools to prepare young people for achievement. The third sector’s role as an equal partner in the lives of children and young people is not fully recognised.

LGBT Youth Scotland has many partnerships with schools and education authorities and regularly provides support, guidance, and training for staff, as well delivering workshops and receiving referrals for pupils. When these activities are embedded into the school or local authority as proactive and preventative strategies: teachers benefit from increased knowledge of issues affecting LGBT young people; pupils receive more inclusive information; and, LGBT pupils have access to more integrated support. LGBT Youth Scotland’s Challenging Homophobia Together project ran from 2010-2013 and worked intensively in four local authorities to build their capacity to recognise, respond to, and prevent discrimination faced by LGBT young people. This approach included professional advisory groups, teacher training, a series of pupil workshops, improving connections with local youth groups, and youth-led initiatives. Evaluations evidenced positive change in LGBT young people’s experiences in the learning environment and increased staff capacity to deliver preventative work.
Strong partnership working, however, is not the norm across all local authorities. In many instances, schools only make contact when an issue arises: when young people need additional support or when staff do not have the confidence to deal with particular situations. Although our work in these instances benefits the individual young people and staff involved, there is unmet potential for improving the overall learning experience for pupils.

If pupils do not feel respected and included, they cannot be effective contributors, successful learners, confident individuals, or responsible citizens. Preventative work supports the goals of pupil engagement and achievement. The third sector has a clear role to play in preventative strategies within education.

Third sector youth work also supports young people who are disengaged from, or not thriving in, formal education. Experiencing homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying can lead to truancy or leaving education. More than half of the LGBT young people who had experienced homophobic and biphobic bullying believed that it had negatively impacted on their education, rising to more than 88% of those who had experienced transphobic bullying\(^1\). One in ten (10%) LGBT young people had left education as a result of discrimination in the learning environment. Fourteen percent (14.3%) of those who had experienced direct homophobic or biphobic bullying, and 42.3% of those who had experienced transphobic bullying, left education as a result.

Beyond the lack of qualifications, LGBT young people who have experienced discrimination can be less likely to seek further education, training or employment opportunities. This is a result of the impact of bullying on emotional, physical and mental health, as well as reduced confidence and fears of experiencing further discrimination. Our research shows that LGBT young people who had not experienced bullying were more likely to be seeking employment than those who had experienced bullying in education. This is also reflected in conversations with have with young people in youth groups and on a one to one basis; concern that potential employers will be discriminatory at the application, interview or employment stage. There are particular concerns raised by transgender young people in regards to

interviews and worries about being told to wear a uniform or clothing that does not reflect their gender identity.

‘I feel anxious about trying to one day find a job if I still do not look like I fit into the gender binary’.

Our work with LGBT young people in youth groups and participation projects creates a safe environment in which to develop skills—such as confidence and public speaking—that may be overlooked with a narrow focus on attainment, yet which are crucial in building a young person’s capacity and readiness for achievement in learning, training and employment. Third sector organisations work with young people to increase their resilience and skills, thus preparing them for further achievement. The value and scope of the third sector’s contribution comes across clearly in YouthLink Scotland’s written submission.

3. Focus on Equalities

A focus on equalities must recognise the impact that all forms of inequality will have on children and young people’s achievements and ensure that barriers are removed. Strong partnership between the public and third sectors should have a clear goal to address inequalities and explicitly mention each protected characteristic. This approach includes joint preventative work within education and building links with the third sector opportunities that increase engagement for disengaged or disadvantaged young people.

For more information, contact Brandi Lee Lough Dennell, Assistant Policy Director
0141 552 7425 brandilee.loughdennell@lgbtyouth.org.uk